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Social media and policing: A review of recent research

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Abstract

Studies of social media's impact on policing have emerged in several disciplines, including criminology, sociology, and communications. Despite their insight, there is no unified body of knowledge regarding this relationship. In an attempt to synthesize extant work, bring coherence to the field, and orient future scholarship, this article summarizes research on social media's implications for practices and perceptions of order maintenance. It does so by identifying how social media's technical affordances empower and constrain police services. By offering new opportunities for surveillance, risk communication, and impression management, emergent technologies augment the police's control of their public visibility and that of the social world. However, they also provide unprecedented capacities to monitor the police and expose, circulate, and mobilize around perceived injustice, whether brutality, racial profiling, or other forms of indiscretion. Considering these issues promises to enhance knowledge on contemporary directions in social control, organizational communication, inequality, and collective action. Suggestions for future research are also explored.

1 | INTRODUCTION

If control of information and visibility are decisive sources of power (Brighenti, 2007; Castells, 2013), the significance of social media—the most recent innovation in mediated communication—is difficult to overstate. Its accessibility, ease-of-use, and participatory, networked character are transforming state-society relations, dynamics distinctly conspicuous for order maintenance, the sovereign state's prerogative power. Over the past decade, scholars in several disciplines have analyzed social media's effects on policing. Despite their contribution, knowledge remains incipient and fragmentary.

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In an effort to bring coherence to existing work, this article assesses research on social media's implications for policing's operational and symbolic contours. While police services have leveraged visible digital spaces to communicate with citizens, sculpt their public image, and augment enforcement, they also allow citizens to expose, discuss, and mobilize around perceived injustice. Accordingly, new media environments are sites of considerable struggle over policing's character, image, and meanings.

After identifying its essential features and societal implications, this paper presents a typology of social media use, distinguishing between law enforcement's status as monitors, producers, and objects of online content. In reducing the opacity of everyday life, social media are indispensable tools of surveillance and intelligence gathering. Police services have also appropriated multi-media platforms as instruments of organizational communication, disseminating content to cultivate community support and enlist citizens in the management of crime, risk, and disorder. Finally, it considers how social media produce a "crisis of visibility" (Haggerty & Sandhu, 2014), unsettling law enforcement's image and reputation. Specifically, it details how publics have utilized online forums to watch the powerful, expose abuse, and encourage institutional reform, oversight, and accountability. The paper concludes by discussing the import of these trends and suggesting future directions for research. Assessing emerging relations between law, society, and technology advances ongoing debates, providing new insights into patterns of social control, stratification, and collective action.

2 | SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Social media are web-based platforms that encourage and facilitate communication, interaction, and the creation and circulation of content within virtual communities (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Whether in relation to social networking (Facebook), photo and video-sharing (Instagram, YouTube), or micro-blogging (Twitter) sites, social media have transformed media systems, irrevocably altering dynamics of production, consumption, and dissemination.

Unlike the mass media, social media are distributed and participatory systems of "many-to-many" communication where those formerly known as the audience emerge as producers of staggering quantities of "user-generated content" (Albrechtslund, 2008; Benkler, 2006). Social media also represent ubiquitous technologies that, for youth in particular, are eclipsing the mass media as an information source (Jewkes, 2015).[1] To the degree that media representations shape what is "socially thinkable" (Welch, Fenwick, & Roberts, 1998), such developments influence how social issues are constructed and perceived (Durant, 2010). Finally, composed of loose networks of users, social media foster an extended and mediated sociality (Boyd, 2010). Their openness and interactivity not only ensure that content can be broadly diffused but also encourage new patterns of affiliation. Various features, whether hashtags (#), mentions (@), "likes," shares, or "retweets," promote connectedness around shared interests and identities, offering an ideal venue for claims making, community-building, and collective action (Castells, 2013; Delanty, 2006).

Given the significance of information acquisition and storage for modern societies (Giddens, 1987; Habermas, 1989; Thompson, 1995), social media's wider effects are far-reaching, complex, and contradictory. While allowing powerful individuals and institutions to publicize their activities and connect with and monitor other users, social media display elite-challenging potential. For Murthy (2011), online platforms represent a "microphone for the masses" and digital agora that empowers ordinary persons to "talk back," acquire and circulate counter-narratives, and shape public knowledge and opinion (Turner, 2010). While often entailing mundane interaction, social media participation can also represent a political act that, by contributing to public debate and deliberation, links the private self to the polity (Papacharissi, 2010). The following sections elaborate these janus-faced qualities, considering social media use by publics and the police, as well as, its consequences for the latter's administrative reach and symbolic standing.

3 | SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE POLICE MANAGEMENT OF VISIBILITY

New technologies provide valuable resources in an era of countervailing demands for fiscal restraint, community engagement, and operational efficiency (Bayley & Shearing, 1996; Marx, 2016). Virtually non-existent a decade

ago, social media platforms have become entrenched, with surveys from the International Association of Chiefs of Police revealing 96 percent of departments regularly employ them (IACP, 2016). In the broadest sense, social media expand opportunities for surveillance and communication, providing tools for systematically gathering and disseminating information. While, in certain circumstances, social media use and adoption reinforce established practices, in others, it produces foundational transformations.

3.1 | Social media as surveillance

With the start of the 21st century, policing has entered an *information era* in which order maintenance is data-driven, intelligence-led, and technologically mediated (Kelling & Moore, 2005). More than "crime fighters" devoted to random patrols and rapid responses, officers increasingly represent "knowledge workers" engaged in processing and evaluating risk-based information (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997; Manning, 1992). Reflecting this reorientation, police in several countries have harnessed social media's potential, deploying intelligence units to conduct online surveillance, reconstruct events, and extract official knowledge about the activities, personalities, and motivations of suspects and victims.[2] Access to digital content that is harder to destroy or conceal enhances investigations and, with the concomitant rise of crowdsourcing, big data, and computer analytics, facilitates networked, automated, and predictive surveillance.

Most significantly, social media fosters conditions of mass visibility and "social saturation" (Trottier, 2012) where the routine documentation and sharing of intimate events erodes public–private boundaries and offers new evidentiary sources. While the contemporary "expository society" empowers citizens as subjects of communication (Harcourt, 2015), when posting content and disclosing information—practices made increasingly common with the ubiquity of portable computing devices and desire to record quotidian activities—they also render their thoughts, behavior, whereabouts, and relations knowable and amenable to institutional oversight (Marwick, 2012; Rule, 2007). Consequently, as social media are embedded in the flows of everyday life, they offer permanent, searchable, and remotely accessible archives of previously private details and occurrences. Alongside helping to clear cases where criminals have, quite illogically, bragged about or documented their exploits online (Sandberg & Ugelvik, 2016; Yar, 2012), public or semi-public content can supplement and verify other evidentiary material (e.g., alibis), providing new justification for offline interventions (Brunty & Helenek, 2014; Frank, Cheng, & Pun, 2011).

Online networks' open and interactive qualities also promote crowdsourced investigations where the knowledge, efforts, and content of online communities is leveraged as a sprawling, extra-institutional surveillance network. For instance, after the 2011 Vancouver Stanley Cup riots, authorities utilized facial recognition software to scrutinize photos and videos published on Facebook by participants, bystanders, and outraged citizens seeking to "name and shame" alleged rioters—efforts facilitating hundreds of arrests (Schneider & Trottier, 2012; Trottier, 2012). Collected content was also reposted to the Vancouver Police Department's Facebook page, with citizens being requested to report anyone they recognized (Schneider, 2016). Similar dynamics were found following the Boston Marathon bombing. Alongside requesting information and photo and video footage to help identify the perpetrators, local and federal law enforcement sought to observe and steer the efforts of "citizen sleuths" or "digilantes," both monitoring content posted on Reddit, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube and admonishing users to avoid spreading rumors or speculative claims (Lally, 2017; Marx, 2013; Nhan, Huey, & Broll, 2017). Intentional or not, in these contexts, the activities of digital communities amplified surveillance, vastly expanding its reach than if relying on police resources alone (Reeves, 2017; Walsh, 2018).

Online environments also provide a virtual "cover," reducing the opportunity costs of undercover work and extending trends where surveillance is remote, anonymous, and undetectable (Marx, 2016; Poster, 1990). In several cases, officers have been assigned to covertly monitor suspects' social media activity, infiltrate their networks, and conduct what amount to warrantless searches (Ferguson, 2017). When privacy controls preclude access, intelligence is assembled by scrutinizing public content from users that communicate with the target. Here, by being tagged in

photos or referenced in messages, users' social networks ensure their details are available without their consent or knowledge (Trottier, 2012). Authorities also befriend and communicate with citizens or broader groups under false pretenses (e.g., creating fake profiles) to acquire insider knowledge (Jewkes, 2015). Such surveillance is less account-able and, in several instances, has targeted lawful and non-violent political, religious, and social organizations—often in clear violation of their civil rights (Bankston & Soltani, 2013; Reeves, 2017). Finally, the police rely on social media companies' cooperation. While generally requiring court orders, several companies, including Twitter and Facebook, maintain police liaisons and regularly share private data (Joh, 2014).

Given their reach into ordinary life, social media promote new ways of collecting data, raising the possibility of truly mass surveillance. While social media surveillance typically involves human monitoring, focused attention, and manual searches, the application of algorithms and computer analytics facilitates automated investigations. Ultimately, "dataveillance" expands the breadth and depth of surveillance, increasing the number of potential targets and volume of information that can be gathered on any single individual (Brayne, 2017; Whitaker, 1999).

Reflecting the "datafication" of policing (Van Dijck, 2014) and rise of "actuarial justice" (Feeley & Simon, 1992), users' surveilled social media content provides an additional layer of intelligence that can be mined and integrated with other sources of "big data" (e.g., purchase patterns and phone records) to deploy suspicion, quantify risk, and profile populations (Amoore, 2013; Cheney-Lippold, 2011). Here, algorithms crawl, parse, and evaluate vast caches of content to identify threats, ascertain identities, and assign individuals to risk groups that warrant further scrutiny (Fuchs, 2013; Gandy, 2007). Alongside public access points, information can also be extracted in the form of metadata concerning, *inter alia*, browsing habits, personal interests, and geo-demographics (Andrejevic, 2012; Eubanks, 2018).

Such developments complement broader shifts towards "proactive" policing (Weisburd, Mastrofski, McNally, Greenspan, & Willis, 2003), with a growing number of departments incorporating algorithms into anticipatory strategies of "pre-crime" (Zedner, 2007).[3] Here, social media data, whether images, communications, geo-location, or relational networks, are passively retrieved, coded, and aggregated with historic crime data and other intelligence to predict when and where future crime is likely to occur, as well as, identify individuals most likely to be involved in criminal incidents (Farinosi, 2011; Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013). In the latter instance, advances in machine learning, pattern-matching, and sentiment analysis allow social media activities and communications to be collated in the service of constructing criminal profiles and information on political beliefs, psychosocial dispositions, affective states, and attitudes towards police (Ferguson, 2017; Langlois, Redden, & Elmer, 2015; Chan & Bennett Moses, 2016). Pre-emptive approaches pose legal and ethical questions about reasonable suspicion and whether citizens can be tracked based on acts they have not yet—and may never—commit. Moreover, to the extent it "makes up" sus-picious populations and orients police assumptions and behavior (Hacking, 1986), dataveillance displays considerable consequences for citizens' well-being, freedom, and other rights and interests.

While they have yet to be widely adopted, security and technology firms have developed several applications for unearthing correlations, forecasting behavior, and pursuing pre-emptive interventions. For instance, Hitachi has devel-oped tools that pool social media activity with other data to identify spatial clusters of online speech that may reveal issues like neighborhood tensions and potential for violence. Additionally, LifeRaft and related products continuously monitor social media, employing language analytics to detect school-related risks, whether cyber-bullying or rampage shootings, and notify the police and school administrators (Mateescu et al., 2015; cf. Brayne, 2017; Harcourt, 2015).

For some, automated systems offer greater efficiency, increasing monitoring's speed and circumference, as well as reducing human error and bias (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013; Porter, 1996; Surette, 2005). However, "fetishizing computation as an objective process, obscures the social side of algorithmic decision-making," ignoring important practical limitations and normative hazards (Brayne, 2017, p. 1004). The mass and complexity of data gathered ensures the "ratio of signal to noise" is generally "far from useful" (Marx, 2013, p. 57), increasing the risk of false positives, mistaken identities, and unwarranted interventions (Eubanks, 2018; cf. Brodeur, 2010; Lyon, 2015). Additionally, "smart" technologies do not appear to have eliminated prejudicial discretion. While all are made visible, official attention remains uneven, with certain locales, individuals, and groups disproportionately surveilled. Whether in relation to terrorism (Amoore, 2013; Sharma & Nijjar, 2018), protests (Dencik, Hintz, & Carey, 2018;

Schneider, 2015), or gangs (Patton et al., 2017), mining the social web broadens the extent of profiling, with those of particular racial, ideological, or ethno-religious backgrounds finding their mediated and offline selves deemed categorically suspect. Practices of "online stop-and-frisk" risk producing pernicious self-fulfilling prophecies (Patton et al., 2017). As data systems generate suspect places and populations, resulting crackdowns produce additional data points, which justify further scrutiny and enforcement (O'Neil, 2016; cf. Walsh, 2014).

For example, in their efforts to address crimes committed by street gangs or "crews," the New York City Police Department launched "Operation Crew Cut," crawling the social media postings of minority youth and using photos, likes, and messages to convict numerous individuals—many of whom were entirely innocent—of criminal conspiracy (Harcourt, 2015). Such practices are particularly troubling as online communications lack the contextual cues present in face-to-face interactions and may be misconstrued or decoded in accordance with prevailing stereotypes (Patton et al., 2017). Accordingly, social media policing may produce technical forms of bias that reinforce, rather than ameliorate, the over-policing and criminalization of youth, low-income communities, and persons of color. Alongside perpetuating disadvantage, by eroding trust, attenuating police–community relations, and generating reluctance to obey police directives or offer assistance, such outcomes may prove criminogenic (Tyler & Huo, 2002).

3.2 | Social media and organizational communication

Social media also transform how the police communicate with citizens and manage the visibility of their personnel and activities. Traditionally dependent on the mass media to engage the public, law enforcement agencies have embraced sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, creating social media teams to produce their own news and directly broadcast content. Existing research suggests that social media are used for the purposes of risk communication, impression management, and soliciting assistance.

Digital media allow police services to immediately transmit information about risk, information that, through sharing and reposting, citizens further disseminate. While the majority of notifications concern mundane issues (e.g., traffic updates), social media has proven valuable during times of crisis and has been utilized to communicate imminent risks to public safety (i.e., natural disasters, mass-shootings and riots); provide real-time alerts, instructions, and updates; and assuage anxiety (Dencik et al., 2018; Procter, Crump, Karstedt, Voss, & Cantijoch, 2013). As Fowler notes (2017; cf. Davis, Alves, & Sklansky, 2014), the chaos and cacophony of online environments increases the risk of misinformation, ensuring law enforcement must also police the facts and establish themselves as the only credible information source.

Social media is also employed for expressive purposes and provides an ideal setting for the police to present their organizational selves. In an era where public support is determined as much by policing's mediated representation as objective reality (Beckett, 1994; O'Malley, 2010; Reiner, 2013), police organizations have devoted considerable resources to "image work" (Mawby, 2013) and "presentational strategies" (Bullock, 2016; Manning, 1978; Schneider, 2016). Evinced in the hiring of media liaisons, public relations officers, and corporate image specialists, the police are deeply invested in influencing public audiences and press coverage (Goldsmith, 2015; Motschall & Cao, 2002). Rather than relying on third-party assistance (e.g., media outlets), social media provides the police stricter control over their appearance and may come to represent "one of the most powerful tools" of "media and public relations" (Lee & McGovern, 2013, p. 115).

Image work on social media typically involves one-way communication and represents an extension of settled communication practices (Crump, 2011; O'Connor, 2017). Here, the police transmit messages about their activities and operations, whether enforcement efforts (strategic priorities, investigations, arrests/seizures, new technologies, etc.); institutional achievements and culture (recruitment, awards, retirements, etc.); and community relations (charitable work, public outreach, human interest stories, etc.; Dai, He, Tian, Giraldi, & Gu, 2017; Lee & McGovern, 2013; Lieberman, Koetzle, & Sakiyama, 2013; O'Connor, 2017). By highlighting their accomplishments, establishing their ties to the community, and demonstrating their effectiveness, the police attempt to cultivate a sanitized image, presenting themselves as expert and professional crime fighters, as well as community-minded public servants. While

images of successful and efficient enforcement help maintain credibility and enhance the state's capacity to govern (Garland, 2001; Reiner, 2010), content that humanizes officers and lessens their distance from citizens can bolster trust and support (Schneider, 2016).

While less common, social media are also utilized as a tool of bidirectional communication and contextualized as community policing (Beshears, 2017; Brainard & Edlins, 2015; Kelly, 2014). Many departments host formal question and answer sessions at designated times, as well as respond to comments over social media (Dai et al., 2017; Schneider, 2016). When backed by the requisite institutional support, online platforms can also provide a channel for citizens to offer feedback and participate in virtual consultations. Certain scholars believe that, by allowing publics to directly access and inform the police of community issues, such approaches can facilitate more intimate encounters and extend community policing's core tenets—participation, decentralization, and collaborative problem-solving (Crump, 2011; Skogan, 2006). Beyond improved police–community relations, by promoting partnerships and information sharing, such approaches may enhance enforcement (Eren, Altunbas, & Koseli, 2014).

While thick commitments to participation can increase law enforcement's legitimacy, transparency, and trustworthiness, such outcomes face considerable obstacles and are far from guaranteed (Aeillo, 2018; Bullock, 2018; Meijer & Thaens, 2013; Ruddell & Jones, 2013). Departmental policies often rigidly dictate communication, begetting content that appears sterile and inauthentic. Moreover, by emphasizing interactions between individuals and authorities, rather than the wider community, citizens remain detached and do not engage in collective action, outcomes lacking the consensual and deliberative qualities of more robust community-oriented approaches (Terpstra, 2009). Finally, participation is often fictively democratic, with the police strictly controlling interactions and citizens being unable to substantively influence and steer decision-making (Kudla & Parnaby, 2018; Schneider, 2016).

Finally, social media are employed to request assistance and encourage individuals to act in ways that minimize risk and insecurity. As such, social media communications complement broader strategies of "responsibilization" (Garland, 1996) and "nodal governance" (Shearing & Wood, 2003) where social ordering and crime control are no longer monopolized by state agencies, but a burden and duty shared with private parties, whether firms, communities, or "active citizens" (Zedner, 2010). When successful, such efforts extend the law's "long arm," allowing states to "govern-at-a-distance" by enrolling and coordinating the actions of others (Ayling, Grabosky, & Shearing, 2009; Crawford, 1999).

Content distributed by police services is often pedagogical and oriented towards promoting self-discipline and private initiative. Whether through public service announcements that offer warnings about enforcement, punishment, and the hazards of unlawful activities or campaigns that instruct citizens on protecting themselves, family members, and property against potential victimization (O'Connor, 2017; Surette, 2014), such efforts aim to prevent crime and "raise consciousness, create a sense of duty, and ... change practices" (Garland, 1996, p. 452). Social media communications also attempt to enlist citizens in the detection and reporting of criminal events. Reflecting efforts to mobilize civilians as additional "eyes and ears" (Marx, 2013), digital platforms are often approached as extensions of Crime Stoppers and related watch programs, with authorities releasing Amber alerts, distributing virtual wanted posters, advertising tip-lines, and posting (sometimes live-streaming) CCTV footage to encourage public vigilance and enhance their gaze, reach, and knowledge (Jewkes, 2015; Lee & McGovern, 2013; Reeves, 2017).

Given their reliance on voluntary participation and individuals' desire to help, the success of these arrangements hinges on public trust and support. Put differently, enlisting citizens will only succeed if the police are perceived as legitimate (O'Connor, 2017). While social media can help promote positive perceptions and interactions, as detailed below, it can also disrupt such efforts.

4 | THE PUBLIC'S USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA: COUNTERSURVEILLANCE AND NETWORKED PUBLICS

Despite providing unprecedented opportunities for official communications and image work, with the ease of online photo and video-sharing, policing's mediated image is increasingly diverse, decentralized, and subject to competing

accounts and interpretations (Goldsmith, 2010; Sandhu & Haggerty, 2017). This section elaborates these dynamics, considering how lay actors have utilized new technologies to subvert the police's public image and scrutinize and correct official misconduct.

First, social media represents a tool of countersurveillance. While producing new techniques for surveying and profiling populations, the arc of technological development also empowers grassroots actors, establishing a "surveillant assemblage" (Haggerty & Ericson, 2000) where divisions between watched and watcher are blurring and powerful actors are no longer afforded the "luxury of invisibility" (Coleman & Ross, 2010, p. 101; cf. Mathiesen, 1997).

In relation to policing, various organizations—the most famous being Copwatch—have mobilized to record police–citizen interactions, whether during routine patrols or protests and demonstrations (Bradshaw, 2013: Huey, Walby, & Doyle, 2006; Monahan, 2006; Toch, 2012). The accessibility and penetration of smartphones has also encouraged incidental and spontaneous witnessing where unsuspecting bystanders react to and film events in progress (Bock, 2016; Brucato, 2015; Schaefer & Steinmetz, 2014). Videos and images of violent encounters, including the deaths of Eric Garner (USA), Ian Tomlinson (UK), Neda Agha-Sultan (Iran), and Sammy Yatim (Canada) at the hand of law enforcement, underscore the significance of watching from below. In these and other similar cases, citizen-captured footage was widely circulated across social networks, stoking the fires of public outrage and often producing official investigations, mass demonstrations, and institutional reforms (Goldsmith, 2010; Sandhu & Haggerty, 2017; Schneider, 2016).

While the use of technology to "police the police" dates back at least to George Holliday's camcorder footage of the 1991 beating of Rodney King (Lawrence, 2000), its prevalence and impact is new, however, and attributable to social media (Bock, 2016; Doyle, 2011; Hockin & Brunson, 2018; Simonson, 2016). Social media offer alternative circuits of publicity, facilitating citizen journalism or instances where technologically literate and equipped individuals document abuse, expose corruption, and provide a check on power. Alongside permitting interested parties to circumvent the mass media and its tendency to reinforce the police's status as "primary definers" of events (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 2013; cf. Chibnall, 2013; Mason, 2009), social media's viral and networked qualities can exponentially amplify the reach and impact of content, making it difficult for the police to confiscate or control footage and transforming local events into globally legible issues (Murthy, 2013). Accordingly, multimedia platforms contribute to the development of a "monitory democracy" (Keane, 2013), allowing publics to directly act as watchdog and ombudsman, rather than relying on journalists and other mediating institutions.

In such instances, it is believed that the visibility social media affords will unmask corruption, promote accountability, and encourage awareness and action. By subjecting officers to "conscious and permanent visibility" (Foucault, 1977, p. 201) monitoring and threats of reputational damage are also meant to deter misconduct. Finally, by offering counter-images and alternative representations, grassroots monitoring unsettles official image work and the police's monopoly in providing authoritative accounts of reality.

Social media also encourages the development of "networked publics" (Boyd, 2010) and forms of "connective action" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013), permitting spatially dispersed users to shape the flow and substance of communication about politically consequential issues (Bimber, 2012; Loader & Mercea, 2011). Accompanying the possibility that it may revitalize civic engagement among marginalized groups (Bennett, 2008; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Carpini, 2006), social media transforms the nature of political participation, encouraging new patterns of "hashtag activism" that, rather than hierarchical, institutionalized, or collectivist, are decentralized, individually motivated, and ad hoc (Earl, Maher, & Elliott, 2017; Yang, 2016).

In relation to policing, social media provide important forums for claims making and mobilization around racialized police violence. While such concerns are hardly new, social media has brought unprecedented attention to the issue, offering opportunities to contest common sense assumptions, alter public attitudes, and apply pressure to produce institutional change (Bradshaw, 2013; Ince, Rojas, & Davis, 2017; Ray, Brown, & Laybourn, 2017). For example, Jackson and Welles (2015; cf. Patton et al., 2016; Schneider, 2016) demonstrated how the Twitter hashtag #myNYPD, which was started by the New York City Police Department to encourage citizens to post positive images, resulted in Twitter users highlighting abuses of power. The most significant example of digital protest, however, is Black Lives Matter (BLM). Born as a hashtag (#BlackLivesMatter) that was widely adopted following the killing of

Michael Brown in 2014, BLM has since emerged as a leading voice in struggles surrounding racial justice, employing the galvanizing issue of police violence to highlight and address broader questions of social inequity (Rickford, 2016). As a decentralized and loosely coordinated movement, digital technologies are vital to its functioning, with BLM being cited as an exemplar of social media's empowering, democratic potential.

According to interviews with participants, social media use is predominantly oriented towards education about police brutality and structural racism, the amplification of marginalized voices, and police reform (Freelon, McIlwain, & Clark, 2016). While activists have long used media to gain attention and expand the scope of their struggles, social media activism is distinct in its multi-vocal and dialogical character: It promotes broad-based participation in claims making and issue framing (Brown, Ray, Summers, & Fraistat, 2017; Ince et al., 2017; Murthy, 2013). For BLM, tagging, sharing, and reposting content helped link and unify conversations, transforming them into trends on Twitter and meaningfully reconfiguring the national discourse surrounding race, policing, and legal control (Carney, 2016). Additionally, participants used Twitter to not only bypass but also critique mainstream press coverage and its tendency to demonize victims and promulgate racially coded images of criminality (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015).

While acknowledging the difficulty of precisely gauging social media's impact, existing research suggests that it has been decisive in propelling stories of police abuse into national prominence, with BLM having demonstrable effects on public opinion and protests at the local and national level (Anderson & Hitlin, 2016; Rickford, 2016). In their analysis of 40.8 million tweets containing #BlackLivesMatter, Freelon et al. (2016) found supporters of BLM successfully exploited weak ties and penetrated non-activist networks, reaching a wider cross section of society and transcending social media's all too frequent status as an echo chamber and "information cocoon" (Sunstein, 2018).

Beyond virtual claims making and community building, social media can help promote and coordinate offline resistance and activism. Alongside publicizing demonstrations and encouraging participation, dynamics on clear display in the cases of BLM, Occupy Wall Street, the Arab Spring, and Global Justice Movement, social media are employed to reflexively monitor and respond to law enforcement. For example, examining Twitter use during the 2009 G20 protests, Earl, McKee Hurwitz, Mejia Mesinas, Tolan, and Arlotti (2013) found that protesters used Twitter to organize meeting spots and circumvent police actions, releasing up-to-date information regarding police where-abouts and tactics (see also Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Gerbaudo, 2018; Ray et al., 2017). As such examples indicate, any advantage the police once had over the control of information has been diminished (Bradshaw, 2013; Wood & Thompson, 2018). While digital activism is often contrasted with "real" activism and disparaged as too ephemeral and solipsistic, such examples reveal how online and offline activities can be interlocking and interdependent.

5 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article has reviewed research on social media and policing. Despite inhabiting distinct disciplines and assessing disparate issues, scholarship is united by shared interests in the policing of visibility and visibility of policing. While social media augments the police's control over relations of visibility—whether in regards to surveillance or informa-tion control—it also unleashes countervailing forces and, in allowing new actors to enter the fold, unsettles these arrangements. Mapping this double movement accentuates key trends in policing, including the intensification of sur-veillance; growing investment in image work; community-based participation and engagement; and the rise of coun-tersurveillance, networked publics, and digital protest. Accounting for such dynamics not only illuminates the shifting social and technical environment in which policing occurs but also advances conversations regarding the capacity of digital tools to effectuate social and institutional change. Moreover, appreciating social media's cross-cutting effects avoids ascribing technologies autonomous power, instead revealing them to be "underdetermined" tools whose meanings, significance, and consequences are flexible and emerge through their use (Fuchs, 2013; Monahan, 2006).

In the spirit of encouraging and orienting future research, the following suggestions are offered. First, there is a need for continued empirical work. Studies of social media surveillance, in particular, are generally theoretical and

speculative, accentuating its potentialities, both good and bad, or drawing on exemplary and idiosyncratic cases. The dearth of systematic studies, whether in the form of participant observation or rigorous comparisons, limits knowledge on social media's actually existing affordances, impediments, and effects. Second, work on social media and organizational communication could benefit from deeper consideration of reception and empirical engagement with how official narratives are perceived, negotiated, and processed by publics. Third, rather than treating them in isolation, scholarship could assess the interrelations and potential trade-offs between different forms of social media use. For instance, are intrusive, technical, and expert-based enforcement efforts corrosive of legitimacy and public relations—the very objectives of image work? Fourth, scholarship should broaden the focus to consider social media use by a plurality of policing agents, whether private security firms, international institutions (e.g., Interpol), or, through autonomous and often extra-legal efforts, private citizens and cyber-vigilantes (but see Trottier, 2016). In relation to grassroots monitoring and activism, existing work has overwhelmingly privileged dissenting voices. Consequently, in developing a more nuanced view of the polarizing landscape of digital environments, future studies should consider how social media are used to document positive interactions with citizens, contest claims of abuse, express support for officers (e.g., #BlueLivesMatter), and disseminate other forms of pro-police content.

Whether as tools of enforcement, communication, or resistance, social media's impact on the contours of legal control is certain to continue. As digital technologies are further developed and diffused, they are likely to become more sophisticated in their capabilities, reach, and impact. The full implications of such changes have only begun to be comprehended. What is apparent, however, is that as technologies evolve, so too will police services and the societies they govern. Although one cannot definitively discern what new dimensions and attributes policing will assume and there is too much contingency to suggest future developments will follow an inexorable path, such trends will inevitably be influenced by shifting technical conditions, political agendas, and popular struggles—as has always been the case.

ENDNOTES

[1] Over 65 percent of adults and 90 percent of 18–34 year olds in Canada, the USA, and Australia use social media (Poushter, 2017). For youth, social media increasingly represent their primary news source (Wakefield, 2016).

[2] According to a recent survey from LexisNexis, 80 percent of departments in the United States utilize social media for intelligence gathering (Giacalone, 2014).

[3] Surveys from the National Institute of Justice revealed 4 percent of the sample and 28 percent of large agencies use predictive analytics software (Strom, 2017).

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